

## IMMIGRATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, yesterday marked another day of peaceful, dignified rallies all over the country in support of comprehensive immigration reform. In fact, in Los Angeles, at the direction and suggestion of Cardinal Mahoney, many people stayed at work and at school. At his request, people met later in the day. Hundreds of thousands of people met at 5:30 p.m. in the day to talk about why it is important that we have peaceful, very powerful demonstrations. The reason: They underscore the need for Congress to pass a strong, comprehensive immigration reform bill.

Last Friday, I had the privilege of discussing this subject with Cardinal Mahoney, the archbishop of Los Angeles, and Cardinal McCarrick, the archbishop of Washington. For me, it was a very moving meeting. I appreciated the chance to visit with these two kind, thoughtful, and spiritual men. Both of them have been tremendous leaders on the issue of immigration. We all agreed that it is of utmost importance for Congress to move forward with the immigration reform bill this year as soon as possible.

Last week, I also had the opportunity to meet with a number of other Senators at the White House with President Bush. As I said after that meeting, I am not in the habit of patting the President on the back, but he deserved credit—and I said so publicly—for calling us together and for hosting a good bipartisan meeting. My hope is that this will continue.

I made clear to the President that Senators on this side of the aisle are committed to comprehensive immigration reform. I pledged to work with the President and the majority leader, as I have in the past, in a bipartisan way on this very important issue.

Every day we fail to fix the immigration system, it gets worse. I have said many times our current immigration system is broken, and it is. We supposedly fixed it 20 years ago, and in the process we have 11 million or 12 million illegal immigrants. We didn't do a good job of fixing it. We must do better. We must have a cohesive, coordinated effort to strengthen border security, create legal mechanisms for American companies to hire essential temporary employees, and encourage the 11 million or 12 million undocumented immigrants in our country to come out of the shadows and be part of America. We need to know who these people are and make sure they are productive, law-abiding, taxpaying members of the community. We must also have proper employer sanction enforcement so that employers do not hire undocumented aliens with impunity. That is so important.

But the question remains: How will we move forward in the Senate? Prior to the Easter recess, I tried, we tried to get agreement on the number of amendments. We couldn't. The best we could get is there were at least 2 dozen.

I tried to get an agreement on conference and couldn't do that.

Why is conference important? As we learned even in high school, when the Senate passes a bill and the House passes a bill on the same subject, the two bodies must meet and work out their differences. In the past, those have been public meetings where the two sides got together and worked out their differences. In recent years, with this Republican-dominated Congress and the President in the White House, conference committees have not been held. The Republican members of a particular committee meet in private with the leadership and come back with whatever they want, ignoring the minority. So that is why it is important we have some agreement on conference.

Over the Easter recess, I sent a letter to the distinguished majority leader, my counterpart, urging him to bring the immigration bill back before the full Senate at the earliest possible time. I expressed my view that the Senate should resume the immigration debate immediately after we completed work on the emergency supplemental appropriations bill. That bill is going to be completed this week, as we heard from the majority leader.

I continue to believe that such a schedule makes a lot of sense. Few other issues are as important and no other is as ripe for Senate debate as this issue. Surely, we can pass comprehensive immigration legislation before the Memorial Day recess. But to accomplish that goal, the majority leader and I need to reach an agreement on the process for completing debate.

There are two basic elements to such an agreement: the number of amendments and an understanding about how the bill will be handled in conference with the House.

Opponents of reform and fairness have filed hundreds of amendments—it is estimated about 500 amendments—to weaken or kill this comprehensive immigration legislation. We Democrats are prepared to debate and vote on some of these amendments, but there must be a finite number of amendments. Before we start the debate, we must know how many amendments there are.

I have made clear to the majority leader that I am flexible on that number. As I said previously, prior to Easter, I suggested three amendments per side. As I indicated earlier, I was told there were at least 2 dozen. We were unable to reach agreement before the recess.

So today I suggest we vote on 10 amendments per side. That is 20. We can have second-degree amendments and, as we have done in recent history, we can have side by sides. That immediately balloons up to 40, and possibly, with side by sides for each of those, 80. I don't think there is any chance that would happen, but it is certainly possible if someone wanted to be mis-

chievous. I am willing to start with that number, 10 amendments per side.

I think this is the right way to do it, but this bill has not had the blessing of the majority in moving forward. This bill is going to take some time to finish. It is not going to be finished in a couple days. I hope we can finish it in a couple weeks, but there is no guarantee of that. But we are willing to work through this.

As important as the number of amendments is what happens in conference, no question about that. With the Republicans in the House having passed a bill making all undocumented immigrants felons—felons—with the House majority leader publicly dismissing the Senate's bill, and with the House Judiciary Committee chairman serving as sponsor of the felon provision in the House legislation—listen to what Chairman SENSENBRENNER said on the House floor. Basically, he said the White House originally proposed the idea to criminalize the undocumented status of these people. This is from Chairman SENSENBRENNER:

At the administration's request, the base bill makes unlawful presence a crime, such as unlawful entry already is. This change makes sense. Aliens who have disregarded our laws by overstaying their visas to remain in the United States illegally should be just as culpable as aliens who have broken our laws to enter and remain here illegally.

Again, at the administration's request, says Chairman SENSENBRENNER. A few days ago, on April 16, a White House source confirmed this statement in the L.A. Times as being accurate.

Does everyone understand why I am a little concerned, a little suspicious? We have the House passing a bill declaring these immigrants as felons, and we are told by the chairman of the House committee that the idea came from the White House, and we have the majority leader in the House saying he doesn't like our bill. So we must have some agreement, and we need it soon. Time is a-wastin', for lack of a better description. It is imperative we have a firm agreement on whom the conferees will be, whom the participants will be, before we move the bill forward. As I have said in the past, membership would consist of Democrats and Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee—10 Republicans, 8 Democrats—and the Republicans would have a 2-vote majority. However, if the distinguished majority leader has an alternative proposal that will protect the completion of a fair conference, I will listen, as will Senator LEAHY, the ranking member of the Judiciary Committee.

We cannot allow the House to hijack this bill and destroy the Senate Judiciary Committee's bipartisan work. Under these unusual circumstances, conference protections are indispensable. There are many kinds of possible conference protections. I have indicated the most straightforward way is to appoint the members of the Judiciary Committee as conferees. The concept of sending a full committee to